

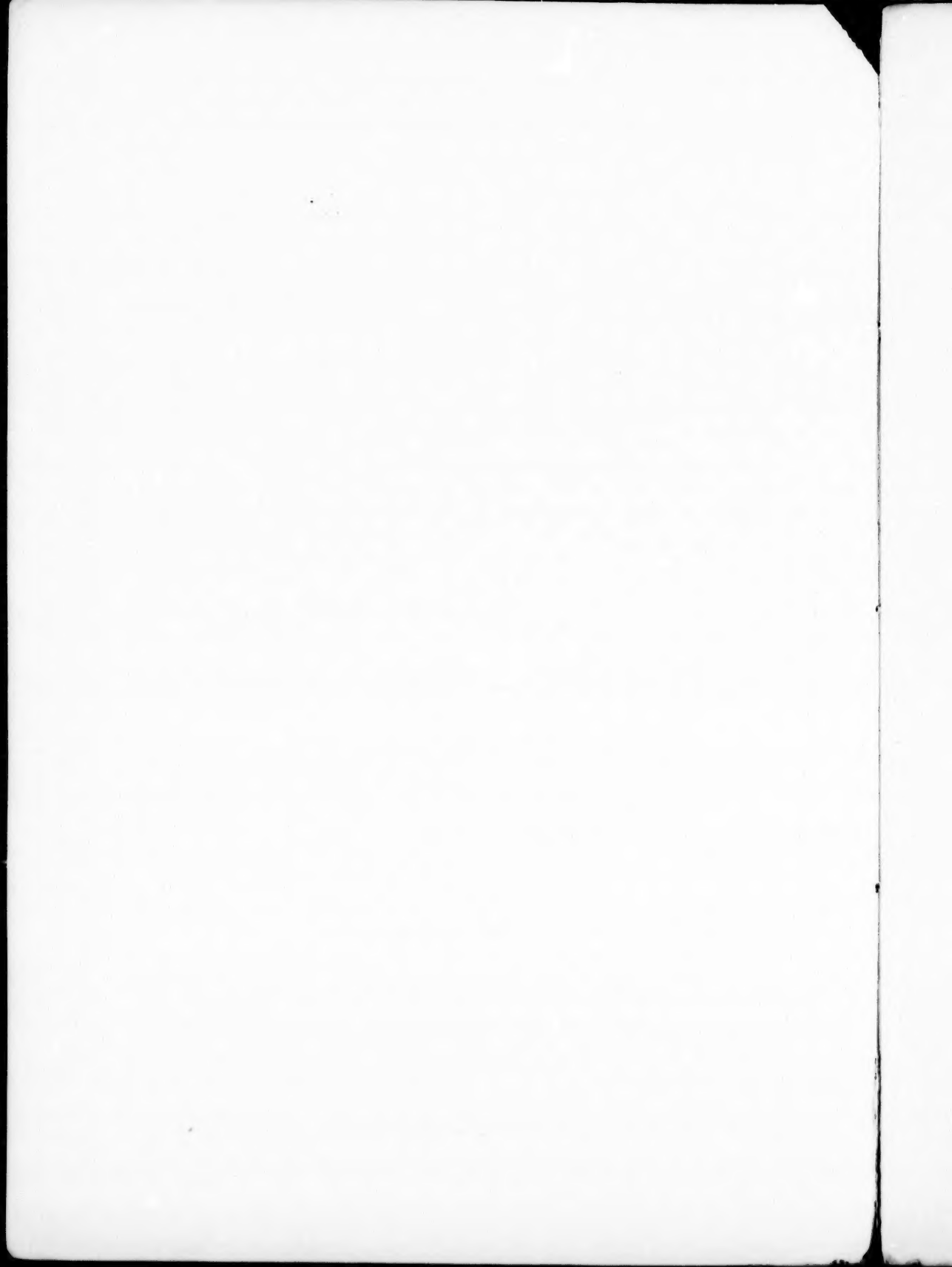
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THE
RESURRECTION
OF
OUR LORD

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV. D. M. RAMSAY,
PASTOR OF KNOX CHURCH, OTTAWA, ON
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ACTS II. 32 :—" *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses* ".

I propose to discuss this morning the proofs of our Lord's resurrection, not that I think it specially the province of the pulpit to defend Christianity. There is even a danger that you, whose personal experience of the power of the gospel affords you the strongest evidence in its favor, should be troubled if any weaker argument be presented. Yet we ought to know how the objections of sceptics may be met; how inquirers may be brought to that frame of mind in which they are disposed to listen to the claims of Christ. Now the proof of no other event in Christian history is so important as this. If Jesus did not rise, He may have been the holiest of men and the greatest of religious teachers, but the Christ of the Gospels He cannot have been. He has not in that case been declared to be the Son of God with power: our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins.

1. *What testimony, then, is borne to this alleged fact?* The four Gospels bear abundant evidence. The only event to which their testimony is more profuse is the crucifixion. There are variations in the narratives, but these do not impair the value of the evidence. Say if you will that these discrepancies cannot be reconciled. Thereby you make it the more notable that the differences relate only to minor points, that as to the great fact itself, all the Gospels are as one. Now I am convinced that the fourth Gospel was written by the beloved disciple, though late in life, and that the other three were written before the downfall of Jerusalem. This belief I cannot now establish, but it is strongly held by the mass of Christian writers, earlier and later. Thus it would appear that men who lived through the events testify to the marvellous fact on which the church is founded. But we possess even stronger testimony. A few critics have denied that so much as one of the writings of the New Testament is genuine, but these extreme men have never won any authority with others of their own school. All with whom any argument can be held have always maintained, that the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, together with the two Epistles to the Corinthians, are the work of Paul. Step by step, indeed, critics are winning their way to the position of the church. Only last year Harnack, of Berlin, one of the ablest and most independent of them, affirmed that at any rate the Gospel of Mark was written by the nephew of Barnabas before A. D. 70,

and that nearly all the Epistles which we ascribe to Paul were composed by him. But for the present purpose, the four great Epistles of this Apostle will suffice, and regarding these it may simply be said, that the character and intellect of Paul are so strongly stamped upon them, that the testimony of all the Christian ages is absolutely immovable. Now in Romans, writing to Christians, many of whom had never felt his own influence, Paul mentions the resurrection of Christ as a matter of course (Rom. i. 4), and in Galatians, writing to a church which was drifting away from his special doctrines, he refers to it as an event in which all parties rejoice (Gal. i. 1). Again, in 1 Cor. 15, addressing men who denied the general resurrection of the dead, he meets them with an inference, evidently nauseous to them, viz., that Christ cannot have risen. Nay, he states in this passage how many persons had actually seen Christ after His resurrection. It has recently been suggested that he meant no more, than that they were convinced that Jesus still lived in heaven. Let us try, then, how this very peculiar sense of the word "see" will suit in another part of the same Epistle. In 1 Cor. 9, Paul is arguing that he is a true Apostle, and by way of proof he asks, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" Does he suggest only that he has as strong a conviction as the other Apostles, that, though already crucified, Jesus still lives in heaven? Did this conviction make a man an apostle, or was it not essential that he should have seen Jesus in the body after He had risen? Here surely is a man who testifies for himself and many others and by common consent, he gave this witness not more than twenty-five years after the crucifixion.

2. *What, then, is the value of all this testimony?* It was once widely held that the disciples, unwilling to confess the defeat of their cause, boldly stole the body and then so audaciously proclaimed their lie that many believed it. This means, it must be observed, that by so brazen a lie, these men were braced for the practice and the preaching of righteousness, that Paul for a lie, which others told him and which he supported by another of his own, gave up his bright prospects in Judaism and flung himself with boundless joy into strenuous labors and untold sufferings. Evidently they were all sincere. No critic of note now denies their honesty. It has indeed been said of late, that their hearers misunderstood their ill-chosen language, and that they were not careful to correct the misapprehension. But the sincerity must have been quite transparent which was so urgent as theirs, for what

is true and pure and just and honorable and lovely and of good report.

Were they then mistaken? Yes, some have answered. Jesus swooned on the cross, was laid in the grave, was revived by the cool air and the spices, crept out to his friends and though he soon died, the disciples were inspirited by his temporary escape, and so went forth to establish the church of the risen One. It is difficult to believe that any one could publish so absurd a theory with a serious face. Were the disciples so foolish as to be encouraged by such an escape, was Paul so mad as to call this a resurrection? No critic is known to hold this view at the present time.

At last we come to the efforts of serious and sober men to account for the convictions of the apostles without conceding a supernatural occurrence. These believe that Jesus died on the cross and that His body mouldered into dust. Says Matthew Arnold :

“ Now He is dead ; far hence He lies
In the lone Syrian town ;
And on His grave with pitying eyes
The Syrian stars look down ”.

But the disciples believed that they saw Him afterwards, deceived by visionary appearances of some sort. They could not be content to let Him rot in the tomb, they were full of the longing to see again the Master who had filled His circle with joy and hope and so they wrought themselves into the conviction that they would see Him again. In such a state it was easy to imagine that He had appeared to them. Excitable people to-day have visions of their absent friends. But you will notice that the hopes of the disciples were crushed by the death of their Master. No doubt they longed for Him who had been their adored Companion, but they were completely disappointed and utterly hopeless. At least, so we are assured by the only witnesses which survive, viz., the Gospels. Nor could it be otherwise. By common consent they had not dreamt of a Messiah who should die. How could they then expect Jesus of Nazareth to rise again? Nor, again, was there time for them to recover naturally from their great depression and by some ordinary means attain to the firm conviction of His resurrection till, as this text testifies, they were preaching boldly as witnesses of His triumph over death. Only the most extreme criticism will discredit wholly this history of the early days of the church. Still more difficult is it to get rid of the

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testimony of Paul. He does indeed affirm that he received visions from the Lord, but it is a long leap to the conclusion that he was a visionary. It is said that on his way to Damascus, his mind was full of wretched thoughts, he became conscience stricken regarding the persecutions, fell into an ecstatic state and heard strange voices and saw strange appearances. Was Paul some weak-minded enthusiast? On the contrary, his was a "sane, strong nature". Not only did he give himself with all enthusiasm to the preaching of a risen Christ, but he conceived a theology which has nourished the profoundest spirits of later ages, he enunciated principles of conduct which have inspired the saintliest men God has given to the church, and he guided the Gentile churches and decided questions of the gravest difficulty with a wisdom which has won universal admiration. Was he not the greatest gift which Providence ever conferred upon mankind? Were there no other witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, one might be well content with his single word.

Thus Christian apologists have, I believe, vanquished every foe which this great truth has so far met. Of course other explanations of the apostolic belief will be proposed. Must we then wait for firm faith till every possible objection has been overcome? Assuredly not. Besides all else, it should be observed that the witnesses speak of a great change wrought upon the body of their Lord. He did not rise, like Lazarus, to renew an earthly life. His was now the spiritual body, and, accordingly the apostles, ceased to expect Him to establish an earthly kingdom and set out to win for Him a spiritual kingdom. What wrought so immediate and mighty a change? Surely some transcendent spiritual impulse was communicated to them. "The power of His resurrection" had wrought within them. Having become in the highest degree a quickening spirit, He quickened them anew by His spirit and through them the church they founded. It is really the character of the Christian church for which we have to account, or, rather, that heavenly idea of it which has carried captive the minds and hearts and lives of the greatest Christian teachers. An effect so transcendent *demands* a cause no less than divine. A supernatural society *must* have had a supernatural origin. And, brethren, He who ennobled and exalted the men of other days can equally bless you. "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die".

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